

August 3, 2024

To Honorable Judge Jarbou,

The pain that writing this has caused me is unsurpassed, but I would do anything for my son, ArisKnight Winfree. I am writing this to provide a context for who he is as a person beyond the facts of this case.

I grew up in China, where my family was persecuted by the Communist-run government. Food was rationed, relatives and neighbors were arrested or sent away to the countryside where they were never heard from again. Our home was regularly searched and ransacked by the Red Guard. When I was 18, my family sent me to the USA at the first available opportunity so that I could have a better life. I left China alone, with only about \$60 in my pocket. When I arrived, I spoke very little English. I put myself through college and worked hard to build a better life for my family. I raised my children to be responsible citizens; to be kind and help others, as I could not have established a new life in this country without the help and kindness of others. I am devastated by ArisKnight's recent actions. I never imagined he would harm another person.

ArisKnight was much loved by his family and was raised with both Christian and Buddhist values. We met Paul Heiselman's family at church, where our children became good friends, all of them singing in the children's choir together. ArisKnight excelled in school and was very good at math, languages, and soccer. He was curious and a hard worker, always starting new projects.

ArisKnight was a very loving child and as an adult he has always tried to take care of me. When I was stressed and working long hours, too busy to eat, ArisKnight would make sure to bring me lunch. When I began having issues with my blood pressure, he bought me 2 blood pressure monitors. When he noticed that I was struggling to work from my laptop, he set up a large monitor so that I could see better and work more comfortably.

In his teens and early twenties, ArisKnight spent a lot of time with his maternal grandfather (my father), helping him with computer problems and cleaning his apartment. After ArisKnight's paternal grandmother was widowed, he would visit her often, bringing over her favorite Burger King meal and playing board games with her to keep her company. These visits to his grandmother continued throughout her late 80's and into her 90's until he was about 27 years old.

I have suspected for several years now that ArisKnight has been struggling with his mental health. Within the last year he was diagnosed with Type 1 Bipolar Disorder. While researching Bipolar 1, I recognized many of his behaviors and issues matched the symptoms of the disorder. Since his diagnosis, he has been prescribed the medication Depakote. I have noticed an increased stability in his mood and manner of speech—he has become more balanced, kinder, and more normal when we talk on the phone, which I believe is a direct result of the medical treatment he is receiving.

ArisKnight has struggled to process and regulate his emotions since childhood. In elementary school his teachers loved him and consistently praised him as a model student, but as soon as he got home from school, he would sometimes completely melt down. He could be extremely well behaved for several days in a row and then become extremely difficult for several days. His father

EXHIBIT A

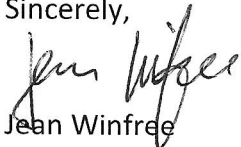
and I often commented on it to one another. When he was unable to regulate his emotions, he would retreat to his room until he calmed down.

During his high school years something changed. He didn't like to spend much time with family, and small requests such as asking him to take out the garbage or move the car a few feet forward could cause him great emotional distress. He would react as if he had been unfairly reprimanded and his voice would quaver as if he was on the verge of tears. I thought it was just a phase of being a teenager. Things got much worse for him in his 20's, especially mid to late 20's. When he was manic, he couldn't sleep for days. He would be up all night. He talked to himself, didn't shower for days, wouldn't come out of his room, and was increasingly distrustful, verbally abusive, and paranoid towards those around him, sometimes refusing to make eye contact with us and ignoring our presence as if we did not exist. Any noise seemed to cause him great sensory discomfort. At one point, we considered calling 9-1-1 to have him involuntarily committed to a hospital, but didn't do it because I was afraid he would lose what little trust he had in us and push us further away.

I didn't understand much about mental health because in Chinese culture, mental illness has a very bad stigma. During this time, ArisKnight moved out of my house and his grandfather and I feared the very real possibility that he might commit suicide. ArisKnight was in a very dark space and we didn't know how to help him other than offering financial assistance and encouraging him to seek professional help. I believe he was scared to seek medical help because he did not want to be labeled as abnormal. He was scared that being medicated would change who he was as a person and that he would no longer be in control of himself. He was adamant that there was nothing wrong with him and any suggestion from us to the contrary would cause him to become completely defensive and closed off. When he was in the dark space, there was no way to talk to him. During that time, when I didn't hear anything from him, I often would reach out to Paul Heiselman to get any information about him and make sure he was okay. Paul was his best friend. ArisKnight tended to follow and listen to Paul.

As a mother and immigrant, I am asking for leniency and by the grace of God to have mercy on my son ArisKnight Winfree. I hope you can see him as a whole person, and take into account that ArisKnight's actions and state of mind were influenced by his Type 1 Bipolar Disorder. I am beyond devastated that my son's actions have caused great pain and damage to the community, his family, and himself. My greatest fear is that extended exposure in a prison environment will only exacerbate ArisKnight's mental health struggles, his distrust and tendency to close himself off to others. My greatest wish is for ArisKnight to receive the medical and therapeutic treatment that he so badly needs. I hope that my son can learn from his mistakes and that he can still become a constructive member of society. As his mother, I will do my best to support him on his path to mental health treatment and rehabilitation. Thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

Sincerely,



Jean Winfree